

The fight to regain the land

Written by Administrator
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Father Heuel was a friend to the Burns Paiute people. He encouraged the tribe to seek payment for Malheur Reservation that was taken from them without their agreement. The case dragged on for 35 years. In 1969, after enormous legal fees were subtracted from the total settlement, 850 Paiute people received as little as \$741 each for the loss of their land. This was because the price of the land was set at 1890 prices, approximately .28 to .45 cents per acre.

In 1935, 760 acres of homestead and submarginal land was purchased with a loan provided by the National Industrial Recovery Act. The tribe repaid the loan with money earned from leasing the small arable farmland of the new property. This land is held in trust by the U.S. government for the Burns Paiute Tribe. In 1938 the Bureau of Indian Affairs built 27 two-bedroom homes on the new land.

Under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1936, tribal elections were held for the first time. This early government consisted of a five-member governing body, elected by position. It was not until 1968, however, that the Constitution and Bylaws for the tribe were written and approved. This formalized and made operational the current tribal government. The tribe was then able to receive government contracts and grants which are the basis of the tribal administration today. Finally, on October 13, 1972 the Burns Paiute were recognized as an independent Indian Tribe.

At that time, the 760 acres bought in 1934 plus the 10 original acres of land were established as the Burns Paiute Reservation. The jurisdiction for this reservation was placed in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Warm Springs, 191 miles northwest of Burns. Individual tribal members still own over 11,000 acres of allotment lands scattered over four townships east of the reservation. Local ranchers lease these allotments for grazing cattle. Allotment lands are also held federally so that they are exempt from taxes, but unlike the reservation, they are within county jurisdiction.